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SEVENTEEN YEARS IN A SECRETARY'S OFFICE

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The Program Committee of the Annual Conference of Foreign Mission Boards held in New York requested each of the Secretaries to prepare a paper describing what special joys and satisfactions he had experienced in his work, what special "problems" he had encountered, and what development had taken place in the work under his administration. This paper was prepared in answer to that request. A number of friends to whom the paper was submitted expressed the opinion that it would be of general interest as a part of our Missionary history, and requested its publication. *Hinc hoc scriptum.*

SECRETARIAL REMINISCENCES AND EXPERIENCES

My entrance upon the work of Secretary of Foreign Missions of the Southern Presbyterian Church was in October, 1893, and was on this wise:

I had been pastor of the Second Presbyterian Church of Nashvile for one year, and had resigned on account of broken health and was on the point of leaving to spend the winter in Florida. The Executive Committee of Foreign Missions was at this time unexpectedly confronted with the resignation of my predecessor, Rev. M. H. Houston, D. D., who insisted upon returning to the field in which he had formerly labored as a missionary in China. My only previous connection with the Foreign Missionary work had been that which was involved in my work as a pastor, and as a member of the Executive Committee for a few months. The Committee had no authority to elect a Secretary. It had simply the power to appoint some one as acting Secretary until the next meeting of the General Assembly. The country was also in the throes

of a great financial panic and the outlook was somber to the last degree. For these reasons it was found extremely difficult to supply the vacancy created by my predecessor's resignation. After two days of fruitless effort on the part of the Committee, as a last resort, and because no other solution of the problem seemed possible, I was appealed to to take charge of the office and do the best with it I could until the meeting of the General Assembly the following May. I entered upon the work under these circumstances, as may well be imagined, with great searchings of heart and with much reluctance and trepidation.

In the six months preceding the meeting of the Assembly I learned some lessons that have been invaluable to me ever since in trying to fulfil the task which Providence has assigned to me. One of these lessons was that the Lord has ways of taking care of the interests of His kingdom in times of stress and peril that are little dreamed of in our philosophy, and that it is simple folly on our part to allow ourselves to be made pessimists as we look out on the future by any conjunction of circumstances what-so-ever.

Several things happened during the first six months of my Secretarial work.

First of all, many good people became alarmed for the Foreign Mission cause for the reason that an obscure and unknown man had been placed in charge of it, and for that reason many gifts were made to the Cause that

in all probability would not otherwise have been made. The anxiety of the friends of the Cause lest the missionaries might suffer on account of the panic was also the occasion of many special donations. There was also a considerable amount of of Presbyterian money for which the owners could find no safe and profitable investment. Everything seemed to be going to pieces in the financial world, and to venture money in business enterprises was almost certainly to lose it. For this reason, a considerable amount of miney found its way into our treasury. When our fiscal year closed it was found that we had not only held our own, but that we had made a considerable advance on the contributions of any previous year, and that instead of being hopelessly in debt, we had a comfortable balance to our credit in the bank.

There have been several financial panics since 1893, in every one of which this same experience has been in some degree repeated.

When the Assembly met, because of the undeserved credit which I received on account of these results of the causes mentioned above, and also because there was still no one else that seemed anxious to assume the responsibility of the office, I was regularly elected as Secretary, and am thankful to be still alive after an experience of seventeen years of the cares and burdens as well as of the joys and satisfactions of that position.

2. As regards the life and work of a Secretaary, I would say that the thing which has

brought the greatest joy and satisfaction into my life is that this work brings one into constant association with the best people in the world. Missionaries are not angels, and it is my individual judgment that not a single one of those now in the flesh has attained to a state of sinless perfection. Their human limitations and infirmities are even accentuated sometimes by the conditions in which they live. Taking them as a class, however, I wish to record the emphatic expression of my belief that they have more of the spirit of Christ than any other single class of men and women in the world. The necessity laid upon them of literally leaving father and mother and sister and brother and houses and lands for Christ's sake and the gospel's, makes the hundred-fold spiritual reward which comes to them mean more than it can possibly mean to any other people as a class. The emptying of their hearts of worldly ambition and the care for worldly comforts, necessarily makes greater room in them for the blessings of the kingdom that is righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Ghost. For these reasons, the privilege of being associated with foreign missionaries in their work is one which it seems to me we ought to hold in very high esteem. It is also a great privilege to occupy a position where one's correspondence and personal contact is so largely with the class of people who support the work of preaching Christ among the heathen. To be joined in the comradeship, and to be the object of the

sympathy and prayers of the men and women whose hearts are enlisted in this work is something for which no one can afford to be otherwise than profoundly grateful.

Over against this feature of the work, of course, are the things which we call our "problems." I have no doubt we would all agree in the statement that the greatest problem each of us has to deal with is himself. To keep one's self free from morbidity of every kind, and so to rule one's spirit as to be able to look calmly at every situation that confronts us; and always to postpone action until the situation has been looked at from every point of view; and never to be overcome of evil, but always to overcome evil with good, *"hic labor, hoc opus est."*

The problem of the missionary suffering from nervous irritability or torpid liver on account of climatic and other conditions is one that sometimes attains to quite serious proportions. What is sometimes needed above all else in such a case is a breath of mountain air or, it may be, some heroic form of medical treatment. I have found by experience, however, that to recommend the latter course is not always the most satisfactory method of relieving the situation. The word of sympahty and kindness, agreement as far as possible with peculiar views and quiet abstention from argument on points where agreement is not possible, will sometimes save a good man to the work. This happened in the case of one our most efficient

missionaries, who imagined that he was more at variance with his church standards than he actually was on the points of divine healing and sanctification. He contended for both only as possibilites, and not as personal experiences. I took the ground with him that his views on both points would, in my judgment, be a help instead of a disadvantage in his work, if in the one case they kept him from the excessive use of drugs, and in the other caused him to try to be as good as possible without making him pharisaical and self-righteous. On this view of the case he continued in the work he was about to give up, and very soon attained to a greatly improved condition of mental and spiritual health and, in consequence of that, of efficiency in his missionary work.

There is also the problem of the generous contributor with a hobby. People are always willing to spend money generously, and sometimes recklessly, for their hobbies. To secure and retain the good will and help of these contributors without yielding to their whims is a very important as well as difficult Secretarial problem. I have in my files some correspondence with this class of givers in which I feel an honest pride. One of the cases was that of a man who offered to give $600 a year to send a man to China to preach the second coming of Christ. On receipt of his proposal, I wrote him as follows:

"My dear Brother:

I regret that it will be impossible for me to comply with your request to send a

man to China, to be supported by you, on the understanding that he goes especially to preach the second coming of Christ. We all believe in that doctrine and think it should be preached in its due proportion by our foreign missionaries as well as by our ministry at home. The same is true with reference to the doctrine of the Divintiy of Christ. As much importance as we attach to that doctrine, however, we would not feel justified in sending a man to China to preach it exclusively, because that would indicate that the man we sent was not a person of well-balanced judgment, which you know is a very necessary qualification for the work of a foreign missionary. There is a phase of this matter which I desire to propose for your consideration. Have you ever reflected that the man you send to China would probably have a life-time business of it to convince the Chinese of the first coming of Christ?

Hoping that you may feel it to be your privilege to help us first of all to get the facts of the life and death and resurrection of Christ made known to the Chinese, so that the way may be thus prepared for preaching to them in its due proportion the doctrine of His second coming, I remain,

Cordialy and fraternally yours,"

To this letter in a few days I received the following reply:

"My dear Brother:

I have received your letter of ———, and after considering the matter I have decided to send you $400 *on your proposition.* Please find enclosed check for that amount. Yours fraternally,"

On the strength of this contribution a missionary was sent out who duly reported his

work to the friend who supported him, and who continued his generous help to the cause to the day of his death.

There are other Secretarial problems whose name is legion, but I suppose that this will be sufficient in the way of suggestion under that head.

3. In the seventeen years since 1894, our Foreign Missionary income has increased from $137,000 to $452,000. The number of our missionaries has increased form 106 to 297. The period of most rapid progress dates from the year 1903, when the plan of an every-member-canvass for Foreign Missions, known as the "Forward Movement," together with the "Special Object" method of assigning to individual churches and to individuals the personal support of missionaries or $50.00 station shares, was formerly adopted as our regular missionary policy by the General Assembly. The chief credit for organizing the work on this method belongs to three young men who were then missionaries under appointment, two of whom, Revs. J. L. Stuart and L. I. Moffettt, are now missionaries in China, and the third, Rev. J. F. Preston, is now a missionary in Korea.

In January, 1905, a second Secretary, Rev. James O. Reavis, was appointed and given especial charge of the Forward Movement and other field work. After six years of indefatigable and eminently efficient service, Dr. Reavis found that the ceaseless travel which the work required was resulting in the im-

pairment of his health, and for that reason resigned and returned to the pastorate.

That which has probably done most to give solidity and steadiness, as well as to promote the enlargement of our work was the adoption by the General Assembly of 1907 of a Missionary Platform, assuming a definite world responsibility for our whole Church, and authorizing our Committee to prosecute the work on the basis of this assumed obligation. The per capita contribution required to carry out this program on its financial side is $4.00. The number of missionaries required is 800. During the past year about 50 of our churches attained the standard of $4.00 per member, and the general average of giving was over $1.65 per member as compared with 85 cents per member in 1893.

Since 1893, we have established no new Missions, but the ones already established have been greatly strengthened, both in the way of men and of equipment. The fruitage of our Mission work in the conversion of souls has increased more than ten-fold. The total number of reported conversions in 1893 was less than 300. The number reported last year was 3,836—the Korean Mission alone reporting 2,010 adult baptisms, and the African Mission 961. This development has not been by spasmodic advances, but by a regular and steady growth, and has been accompanied by a growing intelligence and interest in the work on the part of the Church that fills us with

hope as we face the tasks and responsibilities of the future.

The problems now confronting our Committee in its administrative work which we regard as the most serious are two:

First, there is the problem of building up our income on the line of special object giving, without having the control of the work taken out of our hands by special object givers. It is along this line that almost all our advance in contributions has been made. The desire on the part of our larger contributors to make their gifts in this way is almost universal. Many also, with the erroneous idea that this is the "business" way of doing it, are anxious themselves to direct the details as to how their gifts shall be used. So long, however, as the special objects for which gifts are made are included In the work which the Committee and the Missions are trying to accomplish, the method involves no embarrassment that is comparable in seriousness to that of *the reduction* of income which any attempt to abolish the special object method would certainly involve. If we are to have embarrassment, let it be the *embarrassment* of riches and not of poverty.

Last of all, there is the problem common to us all, of keeping our relations with the native churches properly adjusted in their transition from the state of ecclesiastical and financial dependence to the state of self-support and self-government. This is the problem of missionary statesmanship, the discussion of which

will justify the continuance of this Annual Conference, and furnish occupation for it, profitable or unprofitable, according as our discussions are wise or otherwise, for years to come. The principle asserted by our Committee in dealing with this problem, but not always consistently adhered to, is that of always recognizing to the fullest extent the authority of the native church as soon as organized, and of keeping our missions in a relation of friendly affiliation with, but neither of authority over nor of subjection to the governing powers of the native church. Where this principle has been consistently applied in our work, time has so for vindicated the wisdom of it, and when it has been departed from, our one problem has sooner or later developed into problems manifold.

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